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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002829

SIPDIS

REL/GBR AUS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: RUSAFI PRISON CONDITIONS SURPRISINGLY GOOD

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2760

1B. BAGHDAD 1681

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford.  
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C/REL GBR, AUS) SUMMARY: Iraqi Correctional Service (ICS) Deputy Director General Nadhem Reshid Jebur told EmbOffs during a June 28 visit to the Rusafa men's prison in Baghdad that ICS is serious about instilling a culture of respect for human rights within its organization. New employees are screened and receive extensive human rights training, and special programs exist to help long term employees overcome the 'Saddam mentality.' There are several mechanisms available to prisoners to report allegations of abuse, including the Internal Affairs Unit and human rights ombudsmen who are resident in each facility, and ICS social workers. Nadhem stated that prison capacity is insufficient and worried how ICS will accommodate the proposed transfer of MNF detainees. Conditions at Rusafa, which is considered by Nadhem and DOJ advisors to be a model facility, are good. However, medical staff reported that the majority of prisoners they examine upon intake display some sign of 'trauma,' which the prisoners claim is perpetrated by the police. END SUMMARY.

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INSTILLING A CULTURE OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
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2. (C/REL GBR, AUS) During a June 28 visit to Baghdad's Rusafa prison, Deputy Director General Nadhem Reshid Jebur told EmbOffs that creating a culture of human rights within the ICS continues to be a priority at the highest levels of ICS management. He noted that there is a lack of understanding -- both among ICS personnel and inmates -- about what freedom really entails, as well as how to meld human rights with the law. Nonetheless, ICS officials continue to emphasize human rights and are working to eradicate the 'Saddam mentality' from its ranks.

3. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Nadhem said there are several mechanisms in place to facilitate this shift. New employees are given psychological exams, he said, to help determine their propensity for engaging in abusive behavior. He also said that approximately one-half of the six-week course for new employees comprises human rights training. Employees who were part of ICS under the former regime also receive special training and attention. Nadhem estimated the effectiveness of programs targeting these employees to be approximately 70 percent and admitted that some reluctance remains among them to implement international human rights standards. Those employees who continue to resist the new, human rights-oriented approach are either moved to different facilities or receive some form of administrative punishment.

4. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Nadhem noted that the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) has been actively engaged with ICS. Some facilities have embedded MoHR employees, as does Rusafa, and all have a human rights ombudsman -- an ICS employee. In addition to the ICS' Internal Affairs Unit that investigates abuse complaints, there is a board comprising Ministry of Justice (MoJ), MoHR and Ministry of Interior (MoI) representatives that reviews allegations of prisoner abuse. (NOTE: It was not clear if Nadhem meant that there is one board that investigates abuse allegations or if the boards are specific to each facility. END NOTE.) Nadhem emphasized that ICS has a very good relationship with Saad Hussein, who oversees the MoHR team that is responsible for monitoring prisons.

5. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Prisoners have an additional mechanism for reporting incidents of abuse, said Nadhem. There are 460 ICS social workers, similar

to caseworkers in the U.S. model, to whom each prisoner is assigned. According to Nadhem, the social workers meet with prisoners daily, emphasizing that they (prisoners) are vocal in reporting any mistreatment by ICS staff. (COMMENT: During a tour of the facility, one prisoner expressed his unhappiness to PolOff that condensation from the air conditioner was dripping onto his mattress. He did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity to complain to visitors, nor did he show any hint of fear that he would be punished for doing so. Prison officials seemed equally nonplussed as they explained to PolOff what the inmate was complaining about. END COMMENT.)

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LACK OF CAPACITY WORRISOME  
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16. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Nadhem told EmbOffs that the biggest problem currently facing ICS is capacity. He worried that ICS would be overwhelmed should the Iraqi Government take custody of MNF detainees as proposed. For example, he said, Rusafa 1 has the capacity for 396 prisoners and currently houses 378. However, he was expecting to intake 70 additional prisoners into the facility. (NOTE: MNF's proposal for the transition of detention operations is premised on Iraqi ownership of current Coalition detention facilities and the Coalition-funded training of at least 2,000 additional correctional personnel. However, MNF is concerned that the number of detainees may significantly increase due to ongoing operations. END NOTE.) The problem of overcrowding is exacerbated by the lack of a classification system. Although there is some attempt to separate hardened criminals from other offenders, this does not occur in a systematic fashion.

17. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Rehabilitation programs, such as vocational training, are needed, but, according to Nadhem, the space problem is so dire that it simply is not currently possible. (NOTE: some vocational training is planned for Rusafa, as well as for other prisons on a limited basis. For example, 150 welding machines will be distributed to prisons, including 30 directly to Kurdistan, and last year, the USG provided sewing machines to the women's prison in Kadamiyah. END NOTE.) Nadhem pointed out that there are prisons from which Saddam emptied prisoners just prior to liberation that could be renovated to accommodate an influx of prisoners and alleviate current capacity problems. However, there are 'squatters' in many of these structures, and it would be difficult to move them out. Additionally, this would be a long-term project he said, but a solution is needed now. (NOTE: Two prisons are currently under construction. It is estimated that they will be completed by March/April 2006. The complex at Nasariya is a super maximum facility that will have 1,200 beds and house one prisoner per cell. The Khan Bani Sa'ad prison is a high security facility that will have 1,800 beds. END NOTE.)

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PRISON CONDITIONS GOOD  
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18. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Rusafa is a prison for men and has a contingent of 16 DOJ prison advisors. The newer modules, which have recently been constructed, are clean, air-conditioned, and meet U.S.-formulated international standards (25 square feet per person) for space. There are toilets in each cell, and inmates are issued orange jumpsuits, a mattress, and linens at intake. All the cells are barracks-style. The older modules were constructed over 20 years ago, but their exact age is unknown. The largest cells in those modules house up to 80 prisoners and utilize air coolers. Prisoners are allowed regular access to their lawyers, and male and female visitors are assigned separate visiting days. Visitors communicate with the prisoners through wire barriers. Prisoners are provided at least one hour per day for physical activity -- sometimes more -- and pray either in their cells or in the exercise yard.

19. (C/REL GBR, AUS) The Rusafa complex houses a health unit that employs four physicians and two dentists. Physicians staff the facility from 8:30 AM until 2:30 PM, and medics are on call after office hours. According to the medical staff, all prisoners receive a medical examination at intake,

and respiratory ailments tend to be the biggest medical problem. However, staff also said that the majority of prisoners they screen show evidence of 'trauma' that the prisoners claim is perpetrated by the police. Just prior to EmbOff's visit, medical staff sent a new prisoner to the hospital for treatment. According to the prisoner, the police were responsible for his leg, which had been broken in two places. (NOTE: In a separate conversation, DOJ advisor to the health unit confirmed that the majority of prisoners transferred by the police exhibit signs of abuse. END NOTE.)

110. (C/REL GBR, AUS) The prison complex is exempt from the limitations on electricity usage, but still has frequent outages. Additionally, Rusafa is experiencing problems with sewage backups near the food preparation area. Although there has been no indication thus far that these backups have resulted in health problems, there is concern about the possible degradation of food preparation standards at the facility.

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COMMENT  
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111. (C/REL GBR, AUS) Overall, the conditions at Rusafa are surprisingly good. It is clean, operations appear to be orderly, and inmate living spaces are generally clean and well kept. According to both Nadhem and DOJ advisors, Rusafa is considered to be a model facility and conditions there are generally better than in Iraq's other prisons -- especially in the South. While there are problems, what we saw was consistent with what MoHR has told us (reftels) about the conditions in ICS facilities. However, it is unlikely that Rusafa would have met international U.S. and UN standards without the DOJ and ICITAP advisor presence there. MoJ's increased focus on human rights is clearly evident in the conditions of this prison, and Rusafa is a prime example of the difference that focused attention, resources, and experience can make on Iraq's infrastructure. END COMMENT.

112. (U) REO Hillah, REO Basrah, REO Mosul, and REO Kirkuk, minimize considered.

Satterfield